



# State of Louisiana

## Department of Environmental Quality



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### Environmental News

## Louisiana Pollution Levels for Particulate Matter Deemed Safe

(Baton Rouge) -- The results of air quality data collected by the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) show that Louisiana is meeting new more stringent annual and 24-hour national ambient air quality standards for particulate matter set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Fine particulate matter is also known as PM<sub>2.5</sub>.

"This is good news for the citizens of Louisiana, because meeting these particular standards means public health is being protected," stated DEQ Deputy Secretary Bob Hannah. EPA sets national standards for a number of pollutants that it uses to measure air quality. In Louisiana, the standards for those pollutants have been met across the state with the exception of the Greater Baton Rouge area, which is yet to meet the standard for ozone. "These new EPA standards for the PM<sub>2.5</sub> are very strict," said Hannah. "We are very pleased with these results."

Air quality data from the years 2000-2002 will be used by states to make recommendations on designations of areas as attainment or nonattainment for the new, stricter fine particle standards. The data was collected over a three-year period from 26 air monitoring sites located in metropolitan and rural areas throughout the state. The DEQ Deputy Secretary said that, "based on the results submitted, we are confident that EPA will designate every parish in the state as "attainment" with the air quality standard for PM<sub>2.5</sub>."

Fine particles are of concern because they can easily reach the deepest recesses of the lungs causing risk to both human health and the environment. Exposure to fine particles matter is associated with serious health effects including increased hospital and emergency room visits for people with heart and lung disease. Many health studies have correlated increased exposure to PM<sub>2.5</sub> with increases in premature death as well as a range of serious respiratory and cardiovascular effects.

According to EPA, attainment of the fine particle air quality standards nationally could avoid tens of thousands of premature deaths each year. Attainment could also prevent tens of thousands hospital admission, and millions of work absences and respiratory illnesses in children annually. The standards provide increased health protection

for senior citizens, individuals with preexisting heart or lung disease, children, asthmatics, and asthmatic children who are considered most at risk from exposure to fine particles.

In July of 1997, EPA promulgated air quality standards for fine particulate matter. PM or particulate matter is the term used for a mixture of solid particles and liquid droplets found in outdoor air. Particles that are less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter are known as "fine" particles. 2.5 micrometers is approximately 1/30 the size of a human hair, so small that several thousand of them could fit on the period at the end of this sentence.

Fine particles can be emitted directly or formed in the atmosphere. Particles emitted directly come from sources such as diesel engines, wood burning activities and other industrial and commercial combustion processes. Fine particles formed in the atmosphere are those that are formed when gases from combustion sources such as sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and volatile organic compounds react to form particles of sulfate, nitrate and organic carbon.

EPA will make final designations of areas by December 15, 2004. For additional information on air quality visit DEQ's website at [www.deq.state.la.us/evaluation/index.htm](http://www.deq.state.la.us/evaluation/index.htm).